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that there was anything that Pits didn't excel in as far as duty or anything else goes - as I'm sure you well know. He died doing his job, and if he would have known the consequences of going down that hoist it wouldn't have slowed him up a bit. We know these army recovery operations are no pickics, but up until now we have been real lucky. Counting the 9 we pulled out with Pit's help on the ground, our outfit has pulled out 141 casualties since last October, and this is the first time we've ran into serious difficulties. This figure is only the army troopers we have pulled out - not our regular air crew recoveries or stuff like that.

I feel that it's not our job, but as long as there isn't anyone else to do it down here, we will continue to do it as long as the need exists. Losing Pits won't slow us down any as far as support of this type goes, I only hope that we don't lose anyone else. My PJ's are going to continue going down if they are needed (and only if they are needed) we all know what the risk is. It's just too bad that the army can't get helicopters over here (like the HH3) that are capable of recovering their own casualties from the jungle. The army "Dust-off" medical evac HUEs are doing a great job, but they can only pick up casualties from landing pads - we're the only ones with the hoist capability. We could do a much better job with HH3s - picking up 10 or 15 at a time, but as long as we only have our 43s, we're stuck.

Incidentally, the armor plating received several direct 30 cal hits, and the slugs didn't even dent the plating. The HM would have been killed if it wouldn't have been for that plating.

If any of you have any questions about this, or about SEA - drop me a line. I'm usually slow at answering letters, but will put forth a "max" effort to answer your

Dave Milsten

*Dear Van*

Bien Hoa, Vietnam  
Wednesday, April 13

Dear Van

Am circumventing policy tonight. Any stories or photos which leave my office are supposed to go through headquarters 7th AF, then to MACV for clearance. But for two reasons, I'm sending you the enclosed without going through channels. The first is that you're a buddy in the same business to whom I will always owe favors. The second is that, like most of us who even casually knew this pararescueman, I was very impressed by him and would like to see him get all the posthumous eulogies he deserves.

His last mission began at 1500 Monday, April 11. He and his crew were alerted to rescue lifted number of U.S. Army casualties from Operation Abilene which is still going on about 75 miles east of Saigon. The wounded troops of



"Damage Charlie Five" company out of the 2nd Brigade of the Big Red One, were down in thick jungle. The tree canopy extended about 130 feet up and the only way of getting the wounded out was with a hoist-equipped chopper. Two H-43's from our Detachment 6, 38th AARS, were scrambled. In the first one <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ Captain Harold D. Salem, pilot; Major Maurice G. Kessler, copilot, A/1C Gerald C. Hammon, crew chief, and A/1C William H. Pitsenbarger, pararescue specialist.

They were trailed by a second H-43 flown by Captain Ronald L. Bachman, pilot; Captain Raymond L. Murden, copilot; S/Sgt. David E. Milsten, pararescue specialist and A/1C Thomas C. Story, crew chief.

Both choppers got to the rescue point within one half hour after being alerted. They found a spot in the thick jungle where they could lower and hover below the tops of the trees and just <sup>above</sup> ~~about~~ the secondary growth. The area was too tight for a loaded Huey to lift out of and much too small for a Chinook to get into. So the job fell on the Air



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Force.

Between 1530 and 1700 the two craft had made a total of five flights in and out of the area. They carried 9 wounded soldiers in Stokes litter baskets to a field aid station about seven miles away near the village of Binh Ba.

On the sixth flight, the third for the crew in the first chopper, Salem and ~~the crew~~ reached a hover, started lowering the basket and watched as the men on the ground were reaching for it, when their chopper was suddenly hit by a volley of fire from a .30 cal machine gun. The chopper lurched, the power and rpm went screaming over the red lines and the pilot pulled up rapidly and at the same time, armed and fired the cable cutter separating himself from the basket and the survivors on the ground.

Those left on the ground included Airman Pitsenbarger who had been lowered during the first pick-up to assist ~~with~~ getting the wounded into the stokes litter, strapping them in and hooking the basket to the cable.

With both power and rpm raging above the maximum and with his rudder controls locked, Captain Salem managed to get the chopper to Binh Ba and made a running landing. The engine couldn't be shut down by either the normal or emergency procedures. It was finally stopped by Airman Hammond who removed a few panels in the roof of the cabin and with a hammer beat the fuel controls closed.

There were nine holes in the side of the chopper and two of the four rotor blades had been hit.

The second chopper, meanwhile, attempted to get back into the pick up point but as soon as the enemy's automatic weapons stopped, the VC began <sup>shooting</sup> ~~firing~~ mortars into the area. Friendly artillery from about three different points was called in and it fell with pinpoint accuracy all around the trapped Americans. ~~Naturally~~ the chopper couldn't lower into that

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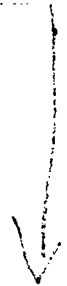


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fire fight and Captain Bachman recovered at Bien Hoa.

In the battle which followed, the VC overran the American position. They attempted to kill all wounded but two managed to survive until morning when other friendly forces finally reached their position. One of the two, an Army sergeant who saw Airman Pitsenbarger shot and killed in the battle, is now at the 93rd Field Hospital between here and Saigon. I'm sending one of my staff there tomorrow to interview this sergeant and get his story on tape. I'll send you a dub of that taped interview.

Of a company of about 180 men, only 14 escaped that battle uninjured. Most were killed. All others were critically wounded. Our losses, in terms of the MACV casualty reports were "heavy".

A few added comments on Pitsenbarger. He was described by the man who perhaps knew him best and respected him most, Captain Dale Potter, rescue pilot, as a "young, eager kid who was always ready to go and always willing get into the thick of the action where he could be <sup>the</sup> most ~~valuable~~ <sup>help</sup>." 

Pitsenbarger had already completed 350 rescue missions.

He's been recommended for the Airman's medal for one episode and should have been awarded at least a DFC for his heroic efforts to save a VNAF survivor of chopper shot down in D Zone last September. *(He WAS NEVER SUBMITTED FOR IT)*

He planned to get out of the Air Force next Fall and had already applied to Arizona State where he hoped to study to become a medical technician or male nurse.

There's a move under way here to name the newly organized, local VFW Post in his honor. He was one of the most active and instrumental of the charter members of this, the first post to be ~~open~~ opened in a combat zone.

As Potter said, "You don't replace people like Pits".